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ABSTRACT

This study examined the perceptions of preservice teachers tutoring non-native English speakers in a local public school. A group of 14 predominantly female preservice teachers participated, nine white and five Hispanic. Participants completed interviews asking about their tutoring experiences. Results found two common themes: most participants were led to the profession through strong, passionate desires to help others, and most shared the belief that their tutees were remarkably bright. Hispanic and white participants had clearly different perspectives on how they related to their tutees, their expectations for them, and their suggestions for intervening on their behalf. They sought to connect with their tutees through different channels. Hispanic participants were able to relate their own struggles in school with those facing their tutees. White participants were impotent when it came to assessing their tutees' needs and defining a plan to help them. They also had trouble separating language skill and cultural knowledge from ability to succeed in school. Hispanic participants held higher expectations for their Hispanic students than did their white counterparts and a more sophisticated understanding of their tutees' academic, social, and language situations. Every white participant expected their Hispanic tutee to drop out of school. (Contains 40 references.) (SM)

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# An Exploration of Pre-Service Teacher Perceptions of Second Language Learners in the Mainstream Classroom

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***Introduction***

It is no secret that while the population of American schools becomes more multicultural, the face of American teachers becomes Whiter and Whiter[1]. Statistics show that nearly 90% of the teacher workforce is White while more than 42% of the public school population is non-White (Lara, 1994; McIntyre, 1997). Already, "minority" populations exceed that of Whites in California and Texas (Lara, 1994). Teacher preparation programs reflect this discrepancy as White women make up the majority of teacher education students. Indeed, as a Teaching Assistant (TA) in the Education Department of a large southwestern university, I have worked with teeming seas of idealistic young women who plan to be teachers. In many of these classes, every single student has been a White female.

A growing body of literature is addressing the increasing, what Fuller calls, "monoculturalism" of the teacher workforce and its impact on a multicultural student body (Fuller, 1994: 269). One critical point of debate is whether schools of education should screen applicants for certain characteristics that would enable them to relate to and successfully work with students of color. Haberman and Post (1998), for example, have argued that schools of education should selectively screen applicants who wish to work in urban schools with large numbers of students of color for qualities such as experience "coping with violence" and "functioning in chaos" (p. 99). Haberman and Post also suggest that the best educators for students of color are most likely teachers of color who come from backgrounds similar to the students with whom they will one day work.

Sleeter (1993) worked with practicing teachers in multicultural workshops for two years but concluded that training White teachers to be more aware of racism, White privilege and hegemony was not a significantly successful endeavor; in fact, resistance and resentment to the whole multicultural training process was paramount. In light of these findings, she advocates, "strongly working to reverse policies that propel mainly White people into the profession, such as the use of the National Teachers Exam, the lengthening of teacher education programs, and other means of defining standards in ways that penalize rather than reward strengths and resources that teachers of color could bring" (p. 168). One disappointing finding of Sleeter's study was that the White teachers she worked with continued to hold low expectations for their students of color throughout the two years of multicultural workshops she led and studied. The impact of teacher expectations is a hot topic that has been examined from Rosenthal and Jacobson's (1968) *Pygmalion* study of the impact of teacher expectations on student IQ to Seyfried's (1998) findings that teacher perceptions of the social skills of African American children had a stronger impact on an African American child's grade point average than any other factor measured.[11] Both Haberman and Sleeter would agree that the abilities of teachers to relate to and understand the life experiences of their students is a necessary quality of a successful teacher. Thus, this first view contends that the best teachers of students of color are likely to have shared experiences with these students that would allow them to empathize with the situations their students are in. Very often then, these best teachers are likely to be people of color themselves, from background similar to their students. Using this argument, teachers who have themselves learned English as a second language

would be a particularly valuable resource in classes populated by English language learners.

The opposing argument is that "it is the responsibility of teacher educators," in the words of Melnick and Zeichner (1998), "to help all teachers, novice and experienced, acquire the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and dispositions need to work effectively with a diverse student population" (p. 88). Melnick and Zeichner recommend that teacher candidates be groomed to develop, among other characteristics, "consciousness of oneself," "openness to change," "attentiveness to others," and "understanding of cultural dimensions of people's lives and their impact on learning" (p. 91). Teacher educators Valli (1995), Wiest (1998), and Fuller (1994) express similar beliefs in the ability to train White, "monocultural"[iii] pre-service teachers to effectively work with students of color with backgrounds dissimilar to that of the average White, middle-class teacher. In their respective case studies, both Valli (1995) and Fuller (1994) witnessed White student teachers and first year teachers successfully adapting to classrooms with high populations of students of color. The key to this success, they both agreed, was a willingness to learn from students, to examine curriculum for dominating and marginalized views, and for the teachers to adjust their own world views to better understand those of their students. Generally speaking, the successful student teachers and first year teachers these researchers observed displayed the characteristics advanced by Melnick and Zeichner (1998) above. Thus, this second view portends that teacher education students can learn, through multicultural education and intensive field service, to successfully work with

students of color. This argument naturally lends itself to the possibility of training future teachers to successfully work with English language learners by teaching them second language acquisition theories, and/or requiring field work with non-native speakers of English.

Following the second point of view discussed above, education colleges across the United States are requiring classes in multicultural education, diversity and second language acquisition for future teachers in growing numbers. The university where I am pursuing my Ph.D. in Foreign Language Education requires two multicultural classes for teacher candidates majoring in elementary education. One of these classes, Sociocultural Influences on Learning, alerts students to such influences as violence, AIDS, poverty, and cultural diversity on school performance. The second course, Second Language Acquisition, seeks to familiarize future teachers with the issues surrounding children in school who do not speak English as a first language, as well as the process of English language acquisition. Because our university is only a few hundred miles from the Mexican border, many Spanish-speaking children populate the local school systems; there is a large Vietnamese population as well. In our area of the United States, bilingual teachers and those with an ESL endorsement are actively sought out by the local school districts. Teachers with these qualifications are often offered signing bonuses that add a few thousand dollars to their first year teacher salary. Even those teacher candidates who do not plan to go into bilingual education or ESL can expect to work with non-native

English speakers throughout their career. This is rapidly becoming true for teachers across the United States (Clair, 1995; Trueba, 1998).

I worked as the Teaching Assistant (TA) for the Second Language Acquisition (SLA) class for two years and for the Sociocultural Influences on Learning (SIL) class for one semester. My first semester working with each of these courses, the two sections of the SLA class required all 140 students to spend from 10-15 hours tutoring a non-native speaker of English in a local public school. The SIL class offered field experience as one option for a required project and of 140 students, about 20 decided to spend 25 hours volunteering in homeless shelters, centers for battered women, the Salvation Army, or tutoring a child of color in an impoverished area. Students were specifically required to work with children in each of these options. At the end of the semester, the professors teaching the SLA sections asked students to summarize their tutoring experience in a two-page paper. The SIL professor required those students who had volunteered to submit a 10-page paper that he would not return to them. I saw them stacked up in his office with not one comment written on them. He asked me to keep them for one calendar year and then throw them away. Thus, aside from these very minimal assignments, neither the professors nor I had much idea of what was going on during the field experiences. Moreover, though students put in from 10 to 25 hours additional hours each semester, they received no, or almost no, feedback on what they were doing. Concerned that students were having rewarding experiences the classes were not tapping into, and more concerned that students were having negative experiences that reinforced

stereotypes and prejudices they may have held (an issue submitted by Haberman and Post, 1992), I endeavored to explore the tutoring assignment required by the Second Language Acquisition course to find out just what students were making of their tutoring experience and how the professors and I could improve the assignment. I chose this course because I became its long term TA and had very good working relationships with the two professors who taught the different sections.

***Methodology***

In both sections of SLA, early in the semester, I appealed for participants who would like to talk to me about their tutoring experience. I told them I wanted to study the strengths and weaknesses of the tutoring requirement and to learn about their experiences in order to refine it. From both classes, I gathered a total of 14 participants who agreed to discuss their experience with me. 13 of these participants were female, with nine described themselves as White and four described themselves as Hispanic. The lone male participant was Hispanic. All White participants were monolingual and had never resided outside of middle-class America. Three Hispanic participants were of Mexican origin and had grown up in Spanish-speaking areas of Texas; all three grew up speaking both English and Spanish with their families and friends. The fourth Hispanic participant was a woman of 45 who was originally from Costa Rica. She had moved to the United States as a teenager. Participants ranged in age from 20 to 45. All participants except two tutored Spanish-speaking children, most of whom were of Mexican descent. Veronica[iv] tutored a child from China and Talia tutored nine siblings from Trinidad.

Because I was exploring the tutoring experience as a whole, I began interviews by asking very general, open-ended questions about the tutoring experience, such as "Tell me about your experience;" and "How's it going at (school)?" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, recommend this type of questioning in qualitative pursuits). One student, Carol, met with me before class several weeks in a row to discuss her tutoring experience and her job as a VISTA volunteer at a local low SES elementary school. Her job was to promote and coordinate tutoring programs for the school, so she was very interested in helping me improve the tutoring component of the class. When she rushed into my office 15 minutes late for our first interview, red hair flying, hand-dyed clothes dragging the floor, small shiny jewel sparkling on her nose, and a grim set to her jaw, I worried that I was seriously inconveniencing her. However, once she started talking, her eyes softened and she spoke in a kind, sympathetic voice that patiently answered any far out, novice-type question I asked her. Because volunteer work was so important to her – she was an Americorps volunteer before finding VISTA – I could see it was important for her to talk to me, to enlighten me to her tutoring experience and to help me improve the course. She thoughtfully responded to my questions with a serious voice and the slow, relaxed mannerisms of an old hippie; funny to see on someone not quite 24. By meeting with me weekly, Carol helped me refine my interviewing skills and narrow down the focus of my study. I am very grateful for her patience and fortitude. When my questions started provoking emotional responses from her, I turned on my tape recorder, took notes of our discussion and then used similar questions with other participants. In this way, I was able to narrow down the focus of my study. Depending on how much ice-breaking was

necessary and on how much they wanted to talk, I spoke with some participants, like Carol and Carola, several times. Others I spoke with just once in a much more focused manner. In all cases I asked very open-ended questions. Nearly always, when I asked them simply to tell me about their tutees, all participants would bring up their perceptions of race, ethnicity, the differences and the similarities between themselves and the children with whom they worked. As Valli (1995) found in her study, race and cultural differences made a very strong impact on my White students.

Interviews were transcribed and summarized through field notes. When all interviews with a participant were complete, I e-mailed each student a summary of their narrative and asked for comments, clarification, and corrections if necessary (this kind of openness is advocated by Lather, 1986). All participants responded enthusiastically to this member checking, whether they were confirming what I'd written or correcting my words. I feel that this dimension of the methodology enables me to speak at least somewhat *with* them rather than *for* them, a distinction I would like to emphasize here (Mohanty, 1994).

***Limitations***

This study was certainly affected by my position as TA in the course. I definitely held a position of power over the students as I graded their papers and they viewed me as an authority figure. However, I feel my experience TA-ing the course for two semesters at the time of this study and working closely with the students in the class enriched this study. I hope my relationship with these students enables me to illustrate at least

somewhat the dimensions of complexity, well intentions, and frailties that add to the mix making up the perspectives of future teachers. Only now, more than one year since the completion of this study and one more year deeper into my own graduate studies, do I realize it is the life histories of the participants that best illuminate these complexities. It is my belief that a quantitative study would have oversimplified this complexity. Moreover, removing myself from the interactive role of teaching assistant in order to take on the perceived objectiveness of a participant observer would have lessened – or at least changed – this study dramatically. Any participation I would have had in the classroom, even if just observing, would have resulted in influences I feel are as strong, if different, than those I had as a TA (Lincoln and Guba, 1989).

## *Findings*

### Lifelong Desires to Help Others

In talking at length with the students I interviewed, I found two areas in which nearly all the students I spoke with agreed. The first was that all participants except for two were led to the profession through strong, passionate desires to help others. Veronica, for example, a White woman of 43, had been out of school for 25 years before taking SLA. Poised and confident, she showed welcome enthusiasm in classroom discussion and in our interviews. As a housewife for25 years, she had devoted much of her time to working with a learning disabled daughter. However, it was the hardships that her brother had faced as a chronically ill child that really pulled her into teaching. Being hospitalized much of the time, he missed out on much of his education. Veronica shared with me that

not being able to keep up with school left her brother feeling hopeless. At the time of this study, she planned to work as a liaison-teacher between schools, hospitals, and homes. She wanted to create a workforce of retired and semi-retired teachers who could work with the chronically ill to keep them from falling too far behind in school.

Carola was a most dramatic example of a woman with a calling. She was a petite, intense woman of 45 who did not look away once after she caught my gaze. When I met with her for the first time, she was in the tenth year of her BA in education. Born in Costa Rica to a wealthy farming family, she always had trouble in school. By the sixth grade, she was declared mentally retarded. At sixteen, her parents scoured their region, looking for a wealthy man to marry and take care of her because they believed she would never be able to take care of herself, but when they found someone, Carola refused in a panic. Soon after that, her father lost their farm and all their *peones* in a gambling bet. Shamed, the family moved to the US to start life anew. Carola, always troubled with school, then had the overarching problem of having limited English proficiency. After graduating from a vocational high school, she worked in factories in New Jersey and in vegetable fields in Miami. She knew how it felt to work hard and to work for someone else. She told me that, "It's very important to give a child English fluency." These thoughts often confounded her professor when he would be emphasizing the importance of bilingualism and Carola would interject the need to learn English first. Her thoughts came from the hardships she had personally endured by not having a strong grasp of her country's dominant language. She told me that she wanted to work with the "Hispanics, my people" to help them "emerge." Because this sounded so poetic, I asked her if I heard her right.

She responded that her people had barriers White Americans could not understand; "I may be an avenue for them," she explained. All the while she talked, she would stare me straight in the eye, elbows on the table, hands against her cheeks. Though she was in the teacher preparation program, she constantly told me that she was "moving up" and searching for "something higher." Later in the semester she told me that she decided to become a high school counselor specifically for Hispanic children because she believed they needed a Hispanic role model in school who would encourage them to apply for college and for scholarships.

Elina's story was equally passionate. From a tiny West Texas town, this first generation Mexican American was 29 years old, married, the mother of a four year old son, and still a year or two away from graduation. Elina was confident and enthusiastic. In addition to volunteering 10 hours for ALD 325, she also volunteered weekly at her son's school. She wrapped up her mandatory hours early in the semester and kept working with her second language learners through the end of the year. She told me that school was never a happy experience for her. When I ask her why she was so positive about learning as an adult, she had to sit back and think for a minute in order to answer. "Gosh, I don't know; that's a good question," said she.

> I think I always knew that learning was important but I just never felt confident and I never felt like I was smart enough and I think that was from the fact that, you know, I had to go from Spanish to English and, you know, maybe I never really caught up.

Elina shared that her parents never put an emphasis on college because they wanted to make sure she could support herself through work because that is what they had always

had to do. Despite her difficulties getting through school and into college, she always wanted to be a teacher. Elina stressed how important it is that children be encouraged to go on to college. She also emphasized that Hispanic kids need to know, "It's neat to be bilingual." No one had ever told her that in school and it still hurt her at the time of this interview.

Talia was a young White woman of 23, already married, and always in a hurry. She hoped to teach in a religiously affiliated school. The day of our interview, she rushed in, sat down and poured out the story of her day. When I asked Talia why she wanted to be a teacher, she told me that since she was three years old, she had "always wanted to be a teacher." Her preschool teacher had taken her "under her wing," and taught her how to read and write at a very early age. I remarked that I was astonished she could remember the experience, and she answered, yes, it's true, "She really molded me." Later a "mean teacher" called her "incompetent." Even at the time of this interview, at least 15 years after the incident, Talia looked crushed and embarrassed. Her eyes became glossy as she related this tale. Teachers can "make or break" students, she told me. She really wanted to "make them."

Except for two young women, one White and one Hispanic, who answered my questions with "I don't know! I don't know what I want to do!" all the students I spoke with for this study were passionately committed to becoming caring teachers. Throughout my own education and my experience working with teachers, I have rarely met a teacher who

entered the profession just to try it out. Teaching is definitely one of those professions that at least begins as a calling.

**The Belief That Children Are Bright**

The second characteristic that nearly all participants shared was the belief that their tutees were remarkably "bright." Given that all these children were recommended for tutoring because they were not doing well in school, I found this phenomenon most intriguing. When I asked Veronica, the participant who tutored a boy from China, whether she had any concerns for his future, she replied, "I have no concerns for W's future. He is such a brilliant child with a great personality that I know he can do anything he wants to do." She characterized his brilliance as rapid progress in reading and writing skills, a large English vocabulary and the ability to easily remember the words he learned with her in large quantities. She was very impressed with W.

Talia also described the Trinidadian children she was working with as "really interesting; they're all real good kids, real bright." When I asked her to define bright for me, she explained,

> I believe these kids are very bright for the simple fact that if they don't understand something or want to know something, they ask.... Their ability to recall and apply the information makes them very bright and intelligent, in my opinion.

In our conversation, Daniel too, said that the child he worked with was "really bright." He explained that E. learned his English words quickly; that he was "quick" in general; and that he loved school. He seemed to easily remember nearly all of the new words he

was learning. Because Daniel spoke both Spanish and English, he monitored E.'s Spanish ability and stated that it, too, seemed right on target. Additionally, Katie told me her child, a fourth grader, was "a really intelligent person." He was good at math and he spoke English well.

Ginny and Carola defined bright by being able to manipulate adults – the system. Ginny told me that her child was "great. He's real smart, cognitively." When I asked her to describe how he was smart, she first answered that he had strong comprehension of verbal and written words and that he had a strong memory for new words. His ability to maneuver through the system, however, impresses her greatly as this talent showed off his ability to get around work or to find answers in sly, sophisticated ways she did not seen the other children employ. Similarly, Carola described the manipulation of adults as a way to define how "sharp" one of the three students she worked with was. With a broad grin, she told me that this Guatemalan boy was "extremely smart, I just have to say." She said he, "can read a lot of cues on the body language of the grown ups.... He can figure it out, a lot of things, with the grown ups – what's going on - more than any other kids." Carola took obvious personal pride in this child and spent a lot of time working with him. She added that the second boy she worked with, "the boy from Honduras, ah, is very smart boy too. He's going slowly but surely; we would say it that way." She said he had a "cautious" attitude; he was conservative with his work and wanted to make sure it was perfect. In our discussion of intelligence, the little girl she was tutoring was clearly missing. I asked Carola to tell me about her. She answered,

> Well, gosh, I think she has the same problems I had at that age. I think she tries really hard.... So I said she has a good, uhm, she's not sharp – I can't find the right word for it – uhm (long pause). 'Cause I, uhm, I thought she was sharp, but when I talked to the teacher, she said, "No, she's not sharp." She has problems with her schooling. Her math is on second grade, but her language – her reading and writing still very low.

She went on to explain how this frustrated her.

> I actually think she's sharp; it's one of the things that is confusing me in a way because we have – somehow we get the idea because they have a language deficiency, they're not sharp enough. Once they begin to hear this and hear the same words, you know their thinking is very smart.... As long as she comes forward and gives me a good explanation, that's when I know she is sharp.

The connection Carola found between herself and this little girl, the fact that they may have had "the same problems," enabled Carola to pin the girl's trouble on language rather than intelligence.[v] Though she at first accepted the teacher's explanation for the girl's troubles, perhaps her maturity, her own experience as an English language learner, her own difficulty in school, or a combination of all these factors allowed her to rethink and disagree with the teacher's assessment. This difference between Carola's understanding of her tutee's intelligence and her teacher's understanding, came across as a difference between the Hispanic and White participants in this study. Although they considered their tutees to be naturally "quick" and "bright," White participants often confused language ability for intelligence. Carola's ability to recognize the child's academic skills in her native language and understand the developmental nature of her English skills enabled her to see the intelligence of the child. All Hispanic participants, as they were all bilingual, were able to effectively assess the general intellectual development of the children with whom they were working. White participants, all of whom were

monolingual, had trouble with this distinction; this confusion will be discussed throughout this paper.

**Different Perceptions Across Ethnicity**

As this study progressed, distinct differences in the perspectives of participants towards their tutees emerged. Through our conversations, Hispanic and White participants had clearly different perspectives on how they related to their tutees, their expectations for their tutees, and their suggestions for intervening on behalf of their tutees.

***Sources of Connection for White Participants***

First, White and Hispanic participants sought to connect with their tutees through different channels. White participants invariably tried to connect with their tutees through personality traits or experiences that they perceived as "normal". Talia, for example, told me directly that she preferred to work with "kids who resemble me;" particularly kids who were shy, like her. Similarly, Carol found a connection to her little girl in her "kindness" and "loving nature." When I asked her to imagine A's home life, she answered that her family must be "very loving" because A was so loving. Similarly, Ginny told me that she really liked one of her tutees because, "He's so considerate and nice." However, when I asked her if she "ever sees (her)self if this little boy," she answered with a firm, "No."

In discussing how she tried to relate to her student, Irma illustrated how difficult it could be for a middle class, White, 27 year old to relate to a poor child of color with limited

English proficiency. When we discussed the child she tutored, Irma emphasized that the little girl was "really, really shy," a characteristic with which she *could not* relate. Throughout our discussion, it was clear that Irma could not identify with the child on any level. She told me several times that the little girl appeared to have, "a sad home life," that she was, "poor, but that's to be expected." Without waiting for me to prompt her, Irma brought up all the questions she had asked the girl to try and find some connection with her. However, as she spoke, it became clear that each question she used to try to relate to the child instead alienated Irma from her. A segment from our interview richly illustrates this process:

Irma: And when I ask her what she did over the weekend, she didn't do anything. So - it's like - you know that there's a mother, but I don't think that they have a TV. They don't –

Sherry: Why do you think that?

I: Oh, I've asked her. When I tried to find out – you know, you try to get close to her – what did you do this weekend? Nothing. Well, did you watch something on TV? No, we don't have one.

S: Oh.

I: Well, did you go to a movie? No. You know, so you kind of get the picture.

S: I wonder if you could ask her other things that don't require money. "*What* did you do."

I: Well, I said, did you go to the park? Uhm, she said no, that she stayed home and helped her mom clean.

S: Okay.

I: And so I said, well, you know, what else did you do. You know, I tried to prompt her, and she said, I read a book.

S: Well, that's good.

I: Yeah, great, I said, what book was it? I don't know? Well, what was it about? I don't know? (mimics valley girl-type intonation)

S: Oh, must have been a good one.

I: Yeah (laughs). So, uhm, yeah, so you learn to ask the right things, especially. So I learned she doesn't have a TV, they don't do anything. You know, or they don't go out to the movies, you know like the other boy does. You just kind of learn what to ask. And it's just kind of sad because you want to take her and go do something with her. She's really sweet, but....

Throughout this related dialogue with L, Irma was trying to find an interest point that she and L shared. However, she only focused on things that were fun for *her*: going to the park, watching TV, and going to the movies. Irma did not taking into account cultural and economic differences she and the child might have had or differences in their life experiences; not everyone considers going to the movies a typical aspect of childhood. Neither did Irma realize that her pointed questions may have distanced the child. With every question Irma asked, both she and L understood that their differences were stronger than any similarities. Irma concluded that L and her family did *nothing*; that L's life was not as rich and full as her own. In order to help the girl, she wanted "to take her and go do *something* with her." In turn, L's constant refrain of "no" and "nothing" can be identified as resistance. Surely the child understood that her tutor considered her home life deficient.

As we talked further, Irma disclosed that while she could not personally relate to L, she related L's situation to that of her nephew. She said that her own birthmother was not

able to take care of her and her sister, and when she was a teenager, her aunt adopted her. At the time of our interview, her sister had a child who, according to Irma, was just as incapable of raising a child as her mother had been. With hands folded carefully on her lap, she explained that,

> We had custody of him (her nephew) for two months. It was the best thing for him. Uh, he had so much love and attention and we read to him and we worked with him on his letters and stuff. Uhm, and he knew when he came home we were gonna be there and he was going to be (okay). Uhm, and he doesn't have that now.

Irma went on to describe her first day at Central Elementary School.

> When we went to the orientation at Central, she (the volunteer coordinator) talked about some of these kids, they come home; they won't know if they're having dinner; they won't know if their parents are going to be home. They won't know.... He doesn't know if my sister is going to be there when he gets home.

Thus, Irma found a connection between the deficient way her nephew was raised and the home lives of the children to be tutored at Central. The orientation meeting added to Irma's impression by emphasizing the economic, cultural, and family quality differences between the tutors and the tutees. As the volunteer coordinator stressed the deficiencies of the tutees, she contrasted them with, and silently affirmed, the normalcy of the tutors. Given her own background and this style of orientation, perhaps it was natural that Irma considered herself a kind of savior for L. Irma felt that children like Ms. L. and her nephew desperately needed someone like herself, a native English speaker, middle class, and White, to help her lead a "normal life" like, In other words, this second child was

much more like Irma. Normal, to Irma, was very clearly centered in the dominant White American culture.

Frankenberg (1997: 1), writes that while other ethnic groups and races are marked, Whiteness remains an "unmarked marker" of dominant status. Kincheloe and Steinberg (1998) add that Whiteness as an ethnicity has escaped being set into time and place because it has been considered the norm throughout Western history. These authors also suggest that Whiteness cannot be separated from notions of power as its dominant status in American society is largely what describes it. However, a precise definition of Whiteness remains elusive (Anijar, 1998; Frankenberg, 1997; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1998; Rodriguez, 1998).

I propose that visions of the American Dream are securely tangled in the construction of Whiteness. As a solid member of the White middle-class with all its privileges, Irma felt a need to proselytize her vision of the American Dream to both her "underprivileged" nephew and the little girl she tutored. Her emphasis on going to the movies, watching TV and visiting parks belied this vision. Rodriguez (1998), terms this type of proselytizing "performances of Whiteness." These performances are active attempts by the dominant group to normalize various Others, including poor children, homosexuals, those of non-Christian background and anyone else who does not fit into mainstream values and culture. For L to have a more normal life, Irma assumed it had to be one like her own because her middle class, White lifestyle set the baseline for normal. However,

as Delpit states, she had no inkling that her own position was privileged and exclusionary so she could not questions her own beliefs of what normal ought to be (Delpit, 1995: 24).

**Sources of Connection for Hispanic Participants**

Rather than identify themselves with the personality traits of their tutees, the Hispanic students I talked with identified with the *struggle* their tutees were going through in school and in life. Thus they found it very easy to relate to the life experiences of their tutees. Every Hispanic participant I spoke with told me that they "know how hard it is" to get through school due to limited English skills, cultural differences and discrimination.

Carola had a keen awareness of the difficulties Hispanic students face in school. She told me she wants to be an educator because,

> Knowing my deficiencies, knowing my difficulties and struggles.... Struggling through, through society as a Hispanic women is why I want to help other children what have the same difficulties what I have.
>
> I know how difficult it is to learn a second language regardless of the age. For some people it's easier than others. In my case, it's been harder.
>
> What I have seen from the Mexican Americans is they have struggles – a lot of them.

Elina, too, identified with the difficulties her tutees were going through. She was most concerned that they would not develop a positive attitude toward learning because school was so difficult for them. She told me, "I guess I sort of relate it back to myself a little

bit, but like with my son, I'm pushing a good attitude about learning." In explaining why school was so hard for her, Elina said,

> I'm positive, now that I think back on like my childhood and my school years, is that what was about to happen to J happened to me. I mean, I'm like totally convinced that that happened.

J was Elina's tutee who, through one half of the semester, was immersed in an English-only kindergarten classroom although her English skills were almost nonexistent. While Elina was tutoring her, J was transferred to a bilingual classroom where she was no longer the only child who spoke Spanish. Elina continued her story,

> I remember being in second grade and still struggling with reading which, you know, maybe if I had been where I should have been, it wouldn't have been that tough for me. Maybe I slipped through the cracks somehow too.

Towards the end of our conversation, Elina emphasized,

> I know how tough it is to come into a school, you know, and pick up another language. I know all of that, I've been through it. I made it through hard work and perseverance. I am proof that you can do it if you really want to.

Similarly, Daniel shared how much it hurt him to see his tutee struggling with school work. "I saw it on his face," he said. In order to help E get through school and go on to college, he explained, "I personally want him to learn English." English was the most basic skill he believed would lead E to a life with alternatives. "I want him to be able to go to the store, and to understand so he doesn't have to struggle in school."

Katie, a 23 year old from a Texas border town where both her parents were teachers described the boy she was working with in multiple layers of relating and understanding. Wearing a big smile, she proudly told me that everyone in her high school was Hispanic; and that she never even thought that was strange until she got to college. While looking through Katie's high school year book, her roommate was the one who first noticed. "Wow," she exclaimed, "You all are all Hispanic!" Katie emphasized to me many times that she was "not like all 'our people' kind of thing," and that she was "not a big classification person." She said that she identified herself as more "a person" than a Mexican-American. In describing the Hispanic child she tutored, she explained that he was really smart and very good in some areas, but not so good in others. His math skills were strong, but his English skills were weak. Her analysis of the reasons for this was simply that the boy spent more time on what he liked to do and less time on what was difficult for him. She related her tutee's experiences to her own when she explained,

> What I learned is that it's really easy uhm to - when I was straight out of high school I've always been like, you know, on the honors track and what I realize is, that it's really easy to be honors and not exactly be in an honors class. It's just whether you do the work, whether you read, whether you keep up with everything, to be actually considered intelligent. Because it's like if I don't read then I can fail quizzes like that (snaps her fingers), you know. It's like easy to get an A or to just you know, bomb something. (Depends on whether you) take the time or not.

Like Daniel, Elina, and Carola, Katie pinned her tutee's troubles on his language skills, not his inability to learn, nor his deficient home life. Astutely, Katie recognized how important it was to be "considered intelligent" by those in power, such as teachers and counselors who directed the "honors" children toward college and the others toward

work. She knew that she had to actually be in the honors classes and recognized by her teachers to get to college and to get what she wanted: choices in her life. Being an "honors person" and being in the "honors track" were two entirely different experiences; she understood the greater value of the latter. Foley (1990) writes that it is these kids who know how to work the system to their advantage to get what they need out of school. In his words, they know how to play the right "making out games" (Foley, 1990: 112). Katie, like Daniel and Carola above, was actively trying to spell out the rules of these making out games to her tutee to help him gain power for himself (Delpit, 1995: 24).

**White Participant Expectations of Tutees**

When I ask Carol what kind of future she saw for her tutee, A, she said she, "hopes for the best," but then abruptly changed the topic. Rocking back and forth in the chair across from mine, she averted her eyes and said positive thing such as everyone in the neighborhood was a "die-hard" fan of Elyssa elementary. Many of the teachers, aides and administrators were alumni. She also said that the school had "great teachers," but that the administration was filled with problems. After some more analysis of the administrative end, Carol hunkered down in her chair, stopped rocking, and pointedly stated that she was, "avoiding the question of what the future holds." As she finally discussed the question, her voice got quieter and quieter, and sadder and sadder. It became hard for her to finish sentences. Finally, she looked me straight in the eye and said, "I don't want to have doubts." A proudly liberal, idealistic young woman, it visibly hurt her not to believe that everyone could become successful. With great sadness, she

said that A's reading level was so low, she might never catch up to her English-speaking peers. With a sigh, she added, "She doesn't even have glasses." By the end of this conversation, Carol had slumped down into her chair, her body as sunken and depressed as her thoughts. Her student, little A, was in the second grade at the time of this analysis.

Similarly, in discussing her tutee's future, Irma explained that she could,

> picture someone like (L) dropping out of school ... because, you know, if you aren't trying hard enough or you're not succeeding, if they hold you back a year, you're going to feel really bad.... I don't know, if she doesn't get the help she needs, I don't see her going to school that much longer.

Though her words, it is apparent that Irma did see some structural influences on L's predicament (i.e., if *they* hold you back...) However, she also blamed the child for not trying hard enough and being overwhelmed by her inability to succeed. This confidence that hard work can make a success out of anyone is a part of Whiteness and helps Whites rationalize why so many people of color do fail to get ahead (Aanerud, 1997; Feagin & Vera, 1995; Rains, 1998). It must just be that they are not working hard enough. With this assessment, Irma was at a loss to see how L would one day succeed. Like Carol, Irma appeared to feel extremely guilty about her assessment of her tutee. She hunkered down in her chair and drew away from me as she quietly whispered what she seemed to feel were terrible confessions. These future teachers, nearly all of whom openly discussed the importance of having high expectations for all children, did not know what to make of their opinions of children who were apparently bright, but unassimilated into mainstream American culture and working at level that were, in their analyses, far below grade level. Their tutees' lack of English proficiency also muddled the picture because

they had great difficulty separated language skill from intellectual ability. One eventual assessment a few of them offered was that their own ideas of success and achievement were very different from their students'. Ginny was a case in point.

When I asked Ginny what kind of future she saw unfolding for the child she was working with, she said,

> I worry – I don't know. My standards are so different. My standards are so different from other people's standards and I can't try to impose mine on him, but, uhm, like he – he just seems so, you know how people just sort of follow in the ways of their parents? Naïve in a sense. I think he's real naïve.

She explained that his naiveté must have come from his father who was from Mexico. His father did not put his money in the bank because he feared that someone might steal it. Trueba (1998), who specializes in the plight of the Mexican immigrant, writes that many immigrants are naïve in this sense due to their rural background, not their ethnicity. The father of Ginny's student almost certainly had never used a bank before moving to the US and lacked the English skills and cultural knowledge to fully understand the advantages of banking in the United States. Ginny saw this naiveté as a weakness that could not be overcome by the child. Even though she had talked at length about how "smart" A was, Ginny expressed that he was too unknowledgeable about the word, due to his home life, to "make it."

Over the course of the semester, Carol updated me weekly on her work with A and her own self-examination of her interests in teaching and learning. One day toward the end of the semester she happily told me that one of the teachers at Elyssa had found a pair of

glasses for A. Since this was Carol's major concern regarding A's achievement, this knowledge elated her. A few weeks later, she pulled me aside to let me know that for her final paper on her tutoring experience she was going to write about how her idea of success and A's were completely different. The notion that A could reach some kind of success, even though it may not be understood or valued by the mainstream society, gave her peace. Still wearing a somewhat guilty look, this notion buoyed her.

**Hispanic Participant Expectations of Tutees**

Unlike the White participants in this study, the Hispanic students had no trouble separating language skill and cultural knowledge from the ability to succeed in school. All Hispanic participants expressed the expectations that their tutees could succeed at *at least* the same levels they had. Compared to their White counterparts, Hispanic participants had a more sophisticated understanding of what it took to *get* this kind of success.

In the beginning of our interview I asked Katie just to tell me about the little boy she was working with; without hesitation, she gushed,

> I'm sure he'll make it. I just wonder how long it's going to take him to catch up to level. Because, uhm, he seems like he's putting effort. He's not there like ah he doesn't want to do his work. No he finishes, it's just that it's all in Spanish and the majority of the class is all in English.

When I asked her to explain what she meant by "making it," she said,

> I see success as going to college so he can have a job and make a living, you know. 'Cause now, they pretty much have to go to college to get a job. I think short term success would be like getting up to level and long

> term would be uhm... so as long as he does achieve in short term, which I think he will, (he'll be okay).

Her insight that the child's developing English ability was influencing his grade level achievement put everything else into perspective for Katie. Her own Spanish fluency enabled her to see that he was performing at a high level in Spanish; she was confident in his intellectual ability. Knowing that his first language skills would eventually transfer to his second language (Collier, 1995), Katie was not worried that her tutee would be below grade level for long.

Similarly, Carola described her three tutees in this fashion:

> For me, all of them can make it.... Okay, to me, making it is, gee, that's kind of hard. Because my standards for myself are above what I am right now. I keep reaching for something higher than this. I keep on thinking that some day I may own my own company and have my own employees. Have my own farm maybe, some things like that.

Unlike Ginny, who expressed the very opposite expectations for her tutees; Carola emphasized that her tutees could succeed at *higher* levels than herself at this point in her life. She talked at length about her hopes for improving her own future, perhaps teaching first, then counseling, then owning her own business and eventually owning her own farm. She was confident her students could go on to college, one perhaps becoming a lawyer, another an interior decorator.

In discussing his tutee, without prompting, Daniel said that, "I really want him to succeed; that's my main goal." Success to Daniel was having the "opportunity to go to school and have alternatives in their life." He told me several times that his child's success was "personal to me." Like Elina, earlier in this paper and Katie above, Daniel

expressed that he knew how hard it was to come out of school with a positive attitude about learning when language and cultural differences, and discrimination could make it so difficult. Like Katie, he was trying to explicitly teach his student effective coping strategies to get through school and move on.

The ability of the Hispanic students to assess their tutees' native language skills and their awareness of the need to explicitly teach their students cultural knowledge and coping skills gave them a distinct advantage over their White, monolingual, monocultural, counterparts. Hispanic participants were able to separate language skill from academic capacity, thus it was easier for them to focus on, in Katie's words, "getting (him) up to level."

Of the nine White students I interviewed, *only two* expressed their belief that their tutee could go to college and succeed to the degree they, themselves, had. One of these participants was Veronica, who tutored a Chinese boy whose parents had chosen to immerse him in a school with no ESL, bilingual education, or other language support service. Veronica admired this child's ability to learn English and assimilate into his classroom culture rapidly. She also told me that his parents were both highly educated engineers who were somewhat fluent in English. The other White participant who had high hopes for her students was Talia, the young woman who worked with nine Trinidadian siblings. Only later, when I was compiling the data for this paper, did I realize Talia's students were not English language learners! They all spoke the Trinidadian version of English and were concentrating more on cultural adjustment than

language adjustment. Consequently, *none* of the White participants who tutored Spanish-speaking children of Latin American descent believed they would be successful by White, middle-class standards. The White participants in this study, all of whom were monolingual and monocultural in that they had never lived in a culture other than mainstream America, seemed to not know how to have high expectations for their Hispanic tutees. Hispanic tutees were often not actively assimilating into the mainstream culture and they were often very poor; two traits the White participants had trouble relating to or understanding. Sleeter (1993) has found that some White teachers resent an English language learner's (and his or her family's) disinterest in assimilating into mainstream American. While I did not gather a feeling of resentment among my participants, I certainly discerned a sense of bewilderment coupled with pity for children they did not believe would not be living the American Dream.

**Suggestions for Intervention Offered by White Participants**

When I asked the White participants what kind of intervention they would suggest in order to help their students succeed, those working with Hispanic students unanimously recommended outside help for their children's families. This missionary-like concern was centered on what they perceived to be home life deficiencies that could only be corrected by the influence of members of the dominant society.

When I ask Ginny what could be done to help this child succeed according to her standards, she offered this:

> I guess having somebody there to teach you about the world. I guess 'cause his dad was coming from Mexico.... I guess when you're growing up in a certain area, you have to – like it would be good for him to have a mentor to just take him out and show him places and explain why things are – and figure why this is this and that is that.

In addition to confusing knowledge about the world with knowledge about the US, Ginny omitted considering the knowledge her tutee's mother may have been able to disseminate to her child. Born in Laredo, Texas, this tutee's mother was an American. What Ginny seemed to really mean in her discussion of the world, was the importance of learning about and assimilating into the dominant American culture. The "someone to teach you about the world," she recommended, was certainly a White, middle-class American much like herself.

Similarly, when I asked Irma to imagine what could be done to help her tutee, L, she said,

> Well, definitely have someone English-speaking in her family.... I really think that when she goes home, she's only speaking in Spanish. Ah, and I think that's a big factor for her learning to read and stuff. I'm thinking that she reads at home in Spanish also. So, uhm, I'd definitely have someone there who would give her some more English speaking practice. Maybe have like a Big Sister or something, one of those groups ... come and do stuff with her. And I mean, of course, the best thing in the world would be everybody has the same amount of wealth and, you know, goes and does things together. But – that's not the real world, so...

Irma held a particularly strong belief in the deficiencies of L's home life. If she could do anything to help the child, she would put an English speaker, certainly a member of the dominant society, right in the child's home to help her and her family. Irma's desires to help the child succeed in school were blurred with her desire to help assimilate her. Her suggestion that a Big Sister also enter the home as a mentor further emphasized her belief in the superiority of – possibly the necessity of – assimilating into mainstream ways.

Her concern that little L was not only speaking, but reading in Spanish at home, was sad evidence that our course, Second Language Acquisition, had not made much of an impact on Irma. Throughout the semester, the professor had emphasized the need for children to develop their native language at home with their parents so they would maintain their familial and cultural relationships (Trueba, 1998a, 1998b), as well as to develop literacy skills that would later transfer to their second language (Collier, 1995). The class had also spent a lot of time discussing the many benefits of additive bilingualism, which promotes the second language as an addition to the first language, not a replacement for it (Lambert, 1974). Subtractive bilingualism, which seeks to replace the first language, was dissuaded by the professor (Lambert, 1974). It appeared that Irma's own life experience and opinions had a much stronger impact on her perceptions of the English language learner she tutored than the materials presented in our class. Indeed, much research on teacher believes gives evidence to the resiliency of the beliefs teachers develop over the courses of their lives (e.g., Butt & Townsend, 1990; Doyle, 1997; Lortie, 1975; Pasch, et al., 1993; Paine, 1989; Spradley & McCurdy, 1984). The fact that our class seemed to have *no* impact on Irma's assessment of little L opened my eyes to the need to re-examine Second Language Acquisition for ways to improve the course.

**Suggestions for Intervention Offered by Hispanic Participants**

In our last interviews, I pointedly asked two Hispanic participants what they thought of the recommendations for intervention offered by White participants in the study. Before I could finish asking Carola this question, she furiously nodded her head and then cut off

my words. "No," she stated. With a smile that contained both exasperation and patience, she said that when her daughter was born, they were the "only Hispanic people in the hospital." Out of what she considered to be good intentions but racism and ignorance, her doctor recommended that a team of White nurses visit her and make sure she knew how to care for her new baby. When they came into her home, Carola explained through a sly smile, she played the perfect hostess, treating the nurses like honored guests, giving them drinks and chatting with them, while keeping her baby locked in another room so the nurses couldn't "take her away." When the nurses decided she was as capable as a "normal" (read White) woman, in good cheer, they left her. This notion that the dominant society "comes in" was not the least bit new to Carola. She was exasperated by it. When I asked Elsa the same question, she angrily protested, "No! *You* take *your* child and show *your* child the things he needs to know." Like Carola, it was clear that she had heard this suggestion before.

All five Hispanic participants stressed the need for teachers, friends and family to be supportive of Hispanic students. Indeed, of the four Hispanic students who participated in this study, only one, Katie, had been academically supported by her parents (both teachers) and community. According to Elina,

> If you don't get good teachers that tell you, 'That's okay, good for you, it's great to be bilingual'... These kids need to hear that. I mean constantly.... I mean it really is neat to be bilingual.

Daniel, Carola and Elina wanted to help children get the support from school that they had never gotten. Katie, though she was supported in her academic endeavors, was

clearly aware that her experience was exceptional. All four based their expectations for their tutees and their recommendations of intervention on personal experience.

Both Ginny's and Irma's suggestions for intervention, that someone – someone like them – go to the children's homes to "mentor" them and take them "out", to "see some things the other kids are seeing" were pinned to the privilege and pervasiveness of Whiteness. Disturbingly, Ginny suggested that only an American could, "teach you about the world." Like Irma, Ginny articulated the need for her tutee to be taken out of his home and to be "shown things" children of the dominant culture readily see, like movies or in A's case, a bank. Hall and Hall (1987) describe this way of relating to children from a different ethnic group and economic class as the "inferior-superior dichotomy," and the "sub-standard dichotomy," that are indirectly expressed by teachers every day in interethnic communications at school. Though they may think they are being encouraging, by expecting their students to hold dear the same cultural values and life style they do, teachers such as these young women express their dissatisfaction with children of color through intonation, body language and how they talk about the children with whom they are working. These dichotomies convey messages to the children that they are inferior to the values and culture their mainstream teachers represent.

**Conclusions**

The most important findings of this study are that the Hispanic pre-service teachers I spoke with all held higher expectations for their Hispanic students than their White counterparts and they had a more sophisticated understanding of their tutees' academic,

social and language situations. Hispanic participants, all of whom were bilingual in Spanish and English, were able to tease out the differences between second language skill and academic ability; they were also able to relate their own struggles in school with those facing their tutees. All Hispanic participants tried to explicitly teach their tutees specific learning strategies and specific cultural information that would help them succeed in school and result in a life rich with choices. White participants, all of whom were monolingual and had never resided in a culture other than that of mainstream America, had great difficulty separating language skill from intellectual and academic ability. White participants were impotent when it came to assessing the needs of their tutees and then defining some kind of plan that could help them. *Every* White participant who worked with a Hispanic child expected that child to drop out of school. Several White participants considered the futures of their Hispanic tutees to involve early marriages and parenthood rather than success defined as the success participants felt they, themselves, had achieved. These low expectations *pained* the White students who professed them, yet they still grasped at them.

How can this make sense when all students who participated in this study expressed passionate desires to improve the lives of children through teaching? The suggestions of Haberman and Post (1998) and the literature on teacher beliefs (e.g., Butt & Townsend, 1990; Doyle, 1997; Lortie, 1975; Pasch, et al., 1993; Paine, 1989; Spradley & McCurdy, 1984), that life experiences influence a teacher's ability to understand, support and scaffold the academic and social needs of their English language learning students and students of color helps make sense of this situation. Our class, Second Language

Acquisition, required this tutoring experience but offered no guidance for the mainstream student who found herself or himself at a loss for what to do with the experience. We required no reflection and offered little or not advice. It seemed that those students who could already relate to their tutees, due to their own life experiences, relied on that knowledge to successfully work with their students without much help from our class. Mainstream, White, monocultural teachers did not gather a lot of readily-applicable methodology from our class, so they relied on their life experiences *which did not match* that of their students. Our class put these students, and their tutees, at a serious disadvantage.

While Hispanic tutees were able to offer specific strategies for achievement, the White participants were much more confused at this point because their privileged positions as member of the White middle-class masked the explicit steps required in order to succeed academically (Delpit, 1995). Rather, White participants believed their role was to instruct the English language learners of color in their charge in what was right and what was good (Luke, 1995). In the cases of Irma and Ginny, their tutees learned that they were deficient by White, middle class standards. They also learned that in order to lead a rich, normal life, they needed to participate in the culture and the lifestyle that their tutors represented (Frankenberg, 1997).

Similarly, the everyday language of teachers and students replicate our nation's sociocultural norms. In the micro-environment of the classroom, history, social science and literature lessons emphasize dominant culture norms and marginalize the

perspectives of people of color (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1998; Semali, 1998). Indeed, American children learn that princesses have "golden blonde hair", that people of color have to worry about the police and welfare agents, and that truancy leads to the shame of becoming a welfare recipient (Luke, 1995: 32 & 34). Ginny and Irma bought into the hegemonic ideas that Mexican Americans were "naïve" and unable to take care of themselves. Both suggested that people like them, White and middle class, "go in" to help these deficient families. Although they would be surprised to hear it, these young women, and Carol too, all of whom believed their intentions were good, were buying into deficit thinking (Valencia, 1997). By believing that Hispanic English language learners could not achieve their own standards for success, these women were constructing lower expectations for their tutees and indirectly working to keep them at the bottom end of the social structure.

The words of Banks are particularly relevant here. He writes that teachers are:

> human beings who bring their prejudices, stereotypes, and misconceptions to the classroom. Teachers' values and perspectives mediate and interact with what they teach and influence the way that messages are communicated and perceived by their students (Banks, 1991: 139).

Thus teacher prejudices, perhaps hidden even to themselves, readily come out in their dealings with, and even their discussions about, children of color. At the same time, most teachers who have struggled through the same barriers they see their students struggle through cannot help but support them in the struggle. All the Hispanic participants I spoke with emphasized the need for their tutees to go to college, get a good job and have alternatives in their lives. Their opinions were very focused and their words were direct.

The actions needed to overcome these barriers were very clear for them because they had already taken them.

That leaves the question, where do we go from here? The findings of this study, support the suggestions of Haberman and Post (1998) to a degree. Life experiences similar to those of their students certainly helped the Hispanic tutors I worked with effectively assess and address the needs of their students. The White, monolingual, monocultural students, on the other hand, failed as effective tutors, and effective future teachers, most notably because they had no guidance from the supposed experts in the class, the professors and myself. Melnick and Zeichner (1998), insist it is the duty of colleges of education "to help all teachers, novice and experienced, acquire the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and dispositions needed to work effectively with a diverse student population" (p. 88). These authors write that if "White, monolingual, middle class" women remain the most populous teacher education students, then colleges of education must make it their mission to transform these women into successful teachers of students of color (p. 88). The first argument presumes prior experience has the strongest impact on teaching ability while the second argument supposes it is teacher education that creates the strongest impact. It seems to me that until further study is given to the belief systems of teachers, which of these approaches is better will remain unclear. Because much work on Whiteness is theoretical rather than empirical (with the notable exception of McIntyre, 1997 and Sleeter 1993, among a few others), and much of the research on teacher beliefs comes from quantitative studies that explore trends and discrete points rather than holistic pictures, it seems that more qualitative narrative and life history studies of the beliefs of

teachers would uncover not only how deep these beliefs run, but also how they come about and how they are manifested. This kind of in depth study of the lives of White teachers, who make up the majority of teacher educators, might enable colleges of education to gage just how malleable their student's belief systems are.

At the same time, the glimpse this research project has given into the experiences of some Hispanic future teachers should not be overlooked. Of the five Hispanic participants in this project, only one had been encouraged by her community, school and family to enroll in college and become a teacher. For everyone but Katie, school had been a very difficult struggle due to language issues and discrimination. The life stories of Carola, Elina, Daniel, Katie, and Elsa give evidence for the advantages educators have when they share the languages, circumstances and experiences of their students. People with these kinds of life experiences should be actively recruited into the teaching profession. They benefit the profession and their students in infinite ways. Moreover, their perspectives are needed from kindergarten right on up to colleges of education if American education is ever going to truly meet the needs of all it peoples.

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Notes

[i] In this proposal, I choose to use the terms White and Hispanic. I use White to signify the European-American blended ethnic group that is the dominant ethnic group in the US today. I use the term Hispanic as the United States Census does to include all people of Latin American and other Spanish-speaking countries. This second term is particularly problematic as Spanish-speaking countries are quite different culturally and ethnically. I maintain this term mostly because the Spanish-speaking students in this self-identified as Hispanic. I use these imperfect terms with the understanding that, in Nieto's (1996) astute words, "Language is always changing. It responds to social, economic, and political events and is therefore an important barometer and descriptor of a society at any given time" (p. 23; as cited in McIntyre, 1997: 171).

[ii] Grade level, academic ability, and parental involvement were the other factors studied.

[iii] Monocultural in this context is applied to monolingual students who have lived only in the dominant culture of American society. Though I believe this is an imperfect term that does not reflect the multipositionings of these White teachers, it is a handy word for discussing those of the "mainstream" (another problematic word), who rarely come into contact with anyone from a culture other than their own.

[iv] All names have been changed.

[v] Much research supports the notion that English language learners are often judged by their language skills rather than their intelligence (see Cummins, 1994 for a good discussion of these misconceptions).



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